

## **Coping With Stress During The Pandemic**

For most people, some element of stress is part of everyday life. But everyday life during a global pandemic is different. It's new to all of us, it's something most people had no idea how to prepare for, and *it's stressful*! The following information was reprinted from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention in order to help you recognize stress and take appropriate steps to cope.

### **Outbreaks can be stressful**

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Coping with stress will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger.

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones; changes in sleep or eating patterns; difficulty sleeping or concentrating; worsening of chronic health problems; worsening of mental health conditions; and/or increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

### **Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations**

How you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, the things that make you different from other people, and the community you live in.

People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include older people and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19; children and teens; people who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors, other health care providers, and first responders; and people who have mental health conditions, including problems with substance use.

### **Take care of yourself and your community**

Taking care of yourself, your friends, and your family can help you cope with stress. Helping others cope with their stress can also make your community stronger.

### **Ways to cope with stress**

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- Take care of your body.
  - Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate.
  - Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals.
  - Exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep.
  - Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.

### **Know the facts to help reduce stress**

Sharing the facts about COVID-19. Understanding the risk to yourself and people you care about can make an outbreak less stressful. When you share accurate information about COVID-19, you can help make people feel less stressed and make a connection with them.

### **Take care of your mental health**

Call your healthcare provider if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row.

People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms. Additional information can be found at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

## **For parents**

Children and teens react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with the COVID-19 calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

Watch for behavior changes in your child. Not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way. Some common changes to watch for include excessive crying or irritation in younger children; returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bedwetting); excessive worry or sadness; unhealthy eating or sleeping habits; irritability and “acting out” behaviors in teens; poor school performance or avoiding school; difficulty with attention and concentration; avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past; unexplained headaches or body pain; use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

Ways to support your child:

- Talk with your child or teen about the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Answer questions and share facts about COVID-19 in a way that your child or teen can understand.
- Reassure your child or teen that they are safe. Let them know it is ok if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.
- Limit your family’s exposure to news coverage of the event, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
- Try to keep up with regular routines. If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities.
- Be a role model. Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members.

## **For people at higher risk for serious illness**

People at higher risk for severe illness, such as older adults, and people with underlying health conditions are also at increased risk of stress due to COVID-19.

- Older adults and people with disabilities are at increased risk for having mental health concerns, such as depression.
- Mental health problems can present as physical complaints (such as headaches or stomachaches) or cognitive problems (such as having trouble concentrating).
- Doctors may be more likely to miss mental health concerns among
  - People with disabilities due to a focus on treating underlying health conditions, compared to people without disabilities.
  - Older adults because depression can be mistaken for a normal part of aging.

## **Common reactions to COVID-19**

- Concern about protecting oneself from the virus because they are at higher risk of serious illness.
- Concern that regular medical care or community services may be disrupted due to facility closures or reductions in services and public transport closure.
- Feeling socially isolated, especially if they live alone or are in a community setting that is not allowing visitors because of the outbreak.
- Guilt if loved ones help them with activities of daily living.
- Increased levels of distress if they:
  - Have mental health concerns before the outbreak, such as depression.
  - Live in lower-income households or have language barriers
  - Experience stigma because of age, race or ethnicity, disability, or perceived likelihood of spreading COVID-19.

## **Support your loved ones**

Check in with your loved ones often. Virtual communication can help you and your loved ones feel less lonely and isolated. Consider connecting with loved ones by telephone, email, mailing letters or cards, text messages; video chat; and social media.

Help keep your loved ones safe. Know what medications your loved one is taking. Try to help them have a four-week supply of prescription and over the counter medications, and see if you can help them have extra on hand. Monitor other medical supplies (oxygen, incontinence, dialysis, wound care) needed and create a back-up plan. Stock up on non-perishable food (canned foods, dried beans, pasta) to have on hand in your home to minimize trips to stores. If you care for a loved one living in a care facility, monitor the situation, and speak with facility administrators or staff over the phone. Ask about the health of the other residents frequently and know the protocol if there is an outbreak.

Take care of your own emotional health. Caring for a loved one can take an emotional toll, especially during an outbreak like COVID-19. There are ways to support yourself.

**Need help? Know someone who does?**

If you or someone you care about are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others

- Call 9-1-1
- Visit the Disaster Distress Helpline at <https://www.samhsa.gov/disaster-preparedness>, call 1-800-985-5990, or text TalkWithUs to 66746
- Visit the National Domestic Violence Hotline at <https://www.thehotline.org/> or call 1-800-799-7233 and TTU 1-800-787-3224

For further information about managing stress during this difficult time, or many other issues related to COVID-19, please visit [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus).